

# **MASTER OF SCIENCE IN ASTRONAUTICAL ENGINEERING**

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## **A STUDY OF THE FEASIBILITY AND APPLICABILITY OF SHAPE CONTROLLED SPACE BASED INFLATABLE MEMBRANE STRUCTURES**

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Inflatable structures used for space applications offer mass, volume, and cost savings to spacecraft programs, allowing larger space structures to be built. For certain space applications, there are advantages to using large structures. For example, antennas achieve higher gains when they are increased in size. Higher gains equate to higher data throughputs. Therefore, inflatable structures offer improvements in performance to certain types of spacecraft components.

Environmental factors induce surface errors on large inflatable structures. This degrades performance, especially for inflatable antennas. To reduce this degradation, active and passive control systems can be used to sense errors and control the shape of the antenna. One method of applying an active and passive control system is by using piezoelectric films that are either attached to or are part of the inflatable structure.

The research performed for this thesis explored the theoretical performance of a large inflatable space-based antenna via spreadsheet analysis and the physical performance of a piezoelectric film via laboratory experimentation. For the laboratory experiment, the film was attached to a drum and varying internal pressures and voltages were applied. Also, in order to validate the experimental results, an analytical model was created using MSC/PATRAN and MSC/NASTRAN software.

**DoD KEY TECHNOLOGY AREAS:** Space Vehicles

**KEYWORDS:** Piezoelectric Film, Inflatable Structure, Antennas, Communications, Satellite Development

